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ABSTRACT

Self-Renewal is a systematic process now being used by many New York City High Schools to solve problems, to improve their planning of programs and policies, and to manage change. Renewal places special emphasis on participative planning and the use of Organizational Development techniques. The concept applies principles of the behavioral sciences to make an organization more effective by systematically involving people throughout the organization in order to improve the quality of decision making. Renewal is applicable in both the public and the private sectors, although the particular process used in New York schools has been adapted to characteristics of the non-business community. Renewal assumes that different schools have different needs, and involves those most affected by the individual school's problems. Unlike traditional planning, which is usually directed by the principal and other administrators, planning in Renewal broadens the base of participation. These factors help to account for Renewal's viability where other problem solving efforts have failed. An additional benefit of Renewal is that it can be utilized in the absence of additional funds for new policies, through the reallocation of priorities and existing funds. (Author/GC)

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BASIC QUESTIONS ASKED ABOUT SCHOOL SELF-RENEWAL

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What is Self-Renewal and how can it help?

Self-Renewal is a systematic process now being used by many New York City High Schools to solve problems, to improve their planning of programs and policies and to manage change. By applying the Renewal planning process, these schools are able to use and enhance the potential of their own creative staff, student and community resources and talents more effectively to meet the varying needs of students, to satisfy the demands of the changing city environment, and to shape their own futures. Renewal places special emphasis on participative planning and the use of Organizational Development techniques. The seven-stage Renewal process encompasses diagnosis of problems, setting clear objectives, identification of options for solving problems, and implementation and evaluation of programs developed to attain the desired objectives. The goal of Renewal is to develop an organization which can increase its ability to respond flexibly and effectively to the many demands of its environment and the future through broad-scale participation of members of the school community. Renewal offers considerable promise for solution of many critical problems facing educational institutions today.

Is Renewal the same as Organizational Development (OD)?

Yes, the concept of OD/Renewal applies principles of the behavioral sciences to make an organization more effective by involving people throughout the organization in solving problems of importance to the organization and its members. In addition, OD/Renewal seeks to improve the quality of decision making by application of a systematic process.

If Renewal/OD is also applicable to schools as well as business and government organizations, what basic modifications are needed?

Renewal or Organizational Development is applicable in both the public and the private sectors. While early applications began in the business community, success there has resulted in the spread of such methods to the public sector. The history of OD's use in school systems is very brief. Although in some respects schools are similar to other complex organizations, they are in many ways unique institutions. Thus, while there is extensive borrowing from general OD concepts, Renewal/OD in school systems has evolved and developed into a theory and technology of its own.
The particular Renewal process used in the New York City High School Self-Renewal Program has been adapted to the special characteristics and constraints in schools that don't exist in the business community. For example, schools have less time and fewer funding resources for planning and carrying out innovative programs than business or government.

What makes Renewal viable when so many other attempts to solve school problems have failed?

Many external attempts have failed because the climate and unique needs of individual schools were not given adequate consideration. Programs and solutions developed outside the system usually did not involve those in the schools who were expected to incorporate them into administrative or teaching practices. Understandably, many educators believed such new

curricula or programs were not applicable to their problems. Renewal, however, assumes that different schools have different needs, thus rejecting any attempt to introduce a pre-packaged curriculum or program developed outside the system. Renewal's primary strength is based on involving those most affected by the problems in assessing the needs of their school and in building specific programs or curricula to meet those unique needs. This approach does not preclude replication of programs or curricula which have been developed elsewhere, provided they are adaptable or can be modified to meet the school's unique requirements.

How does planning in Renewal differ from traditional planning?

Traditional planning usually is directed by the principal and other administrators who determine goals and assign staff. Planning in Renewal does not supplant top administration but instead augments its efforts by broadening the base of participation through involving all of those who are affected, thus bringing new insight and creativity to bear on mutual concerns. School planning traditionally encompasses both operational planning to maintain the organization and crisis-oriented planning to deal immediately with the many frequent crises that occur in today's schools. Although Renewal recognizes the need for crisis-oriented action, it essentially emphasizes systematic long-range planning including planning to solve problems with which existing programs do not cope.

Is Renewal relevant in times of budgetary crisis when funds are not available for special project development?

Yes, the way in which the Renewal process is applied can vary according to available resources and the particular problems of the school. In times of budgetary cutbacks and financial crisis, Renewal might be used most productively to reassess priorities, procedures and policies instead of for expansion and/or development of new programs which require additional funds that are not available.

Can Renewal be applied in a new school?

Despite its name, the systematic Renewal process may be especially helpful in developing policies and procedures for a new school because there is more time for long-range planning. In addition, Renewal can have significant impact in both new and recently-opened schools since there is no need to work within the confines of existing programs that are deeply entrenched in older schools.

Is Renewal a product or a process?

Renewal is a process not a product. It involves a sequence of stages to determine how to arrive at products or results. The use of the process does not involve taking a specific position on content. In other words, Renewal can be used in a variety of situations and for wide-range or limited applications.

What does Renewal cost?

Renewal does not necessarily require new expenditures or released-time positions. It usually requires some reallocation of funds within the school's existing budget, but costs in dollars can be minimal. More important in the Renewal process is a commitment of interest and time by concerned members of the school community to examine problems, explore alternative solutions and develop plans. Renewal requires strong support of those plans by school leadership through reorganization of priorities, procedures and/or policies.

How does a school get involved?

The Director of the Division of High Schools and Borough Superintendents collaborate in nomination of schools for Renewal. Principals of the nominated schools learn about Renewal through their superintendent and a meeting with the Renewal consultants. Discussion with principals of other Renewal schools also helps a principal to decide whether to introduce Renewal in his or her school. After a principal has decided to use Renewal in his or her school, interested school leaders and staff are encouraged to participate in Renewal workshops and colloquia to enable them to maximize the initial development of the Renewal process within the school.
An important concept in Renewal is "ownership," a strong sense of responsibility by the people involved in the process which results from their active participation in the Renewal process. Therefore, the principal is responsible not only for initiating the program but also for involving the various constituencies of the school community as quickly as possible.

Who are the participants in Renewal?

The organizations and persons that participate in Renewal are: a school, including staff, students, parents and community; the Division of High Schools of the Board of Education; Renewal consulting staff; and representatives from the business community. Each assumes a well-defined and significant role in the challenging and rewarding process of school Self-Renewal.